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SUBJECT: ROK-PRC SUMMIT MEETING: NORTH KOREA ISSUES
DOMINATE ONE-ON-ONE TALKS

Classified By: Classified By: POL M/C Joseph Yun. Reasons 1.4(b/d)

¶1. (C) Summary: In an August 26 meeting with POL M/C, MOFAT Director General for Northeast Asian Affairs Cho Tai-young said that Presidents Lee and Hu held extensive discussions on North Korea during the August 25 ROK-PRC summit meeting. Lee requested Hu's assistance in persuading the North to resume the inter-Korean dialogue but was disappointed with Hu's perfunctory response wishing both sides well. Lee raised the issue of North Korean defectors in China and Hu did not comment. Hu also made no response on Lee's suggestion to have discussions on "possible situations on the Korean peninsula," a code phrase for a North Korean collapse scenario. Outside North Korea issues, the two Presidents saw eye-to-eye on many issues, especially on expanding political, economic, people-to-people and cultural exchanges, well detailed in the seven-page joint statement (faxed to EAP/K).
End Summary.

¶2. (C) Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFAT) Director General of the Northeast Asian Affairs Bureau Cho Tai-young on August 26 gave Political Minister Counselor a read out on PRC President Hu Jintao's August 25-26 state visit to Seoul. Hu arrived in Seoul at noon on August 25 and departed early afternoon August 26. Besides his meeting with President Lee and a state dinner, Hu met Prime Minister Han Seung-soo, National Assembly Speaker Kim Hyong-o, and was hosted for lunch by Korea's four leading economic organizations. This was the third Lee-Hu meeting since May, indicative of the close and amicable relations between the ROK and China. Still, DG Cho said that he was concerned about the prevailing anti-Korean sentiment in China, which had roots in history and culture. The most recent manifestation was during the Olympics when a Korean television network (SBS) aired rehearsal recordings of the opening ceremony, angering Chinese people and authorities alike.

South-North Dialogue

¶3. (C) Lee told Hu, the Mt. Kumgang shooting incident notwithstanding, the ROK wanted dialogue with the DPRK but could not accept the DPRK prerequisite demand that the ROK pledge to respect and implement all the agreements in the two North-South summit declarations, June 2000 and October 2007. Cho said the ROK could not make such a pledge because the cost of implementing the October 4 summit agreement would be 50-100 billion dollars, an impossibly huge amount. The ROK was prepared to hold discussions on prioritizing the projects, but these had to be "meaningful," Lee told Hu. Lee requested Hu's assistance in persuading the North to resume the inter-Korean dialogue. However, the Korean side was

disappointed that Hu responded with boilerplate language wishing both sides well. Cho said the ROK will continue to wait on the DPRK "even if it takes time."

Human Rights

14. (C) Over initial Chinese objections, the ROK was successful in including in the Joint Statement a commitment "to promote dialogue and cooperation in the field of international human rights." Cho said the inclusion was the beginning of a Korean effort to create the basis for ROK-PRC discussions on global human rights. Cho did not expect to engage the Chinese in any specific items, such as human rights in China or North Korea. Cho said Seoul wanted to include human rights because Japan has a similar dialogue with China.

15. (C) Lee raised the issue of North Korean defectors with Hu and said they should not be repatriated against their will. Hu had no comment.

Humanitarian Aid to North Korea

16. With regard to humanitarian aid, Lee told Hu that the ROK was always "open." Beyond humanitarian assistance, Lee said that Seoul was waiting on the denuclearization verification process to be completed and the DPRK to be de-listed by the U.S. before increasing assistance levels. After an agreement

on verification and de-listing, the ROK expects that the DPRK's economy could also be revitalized by the assistance it would receive from the international community. This was his "wish," Lee told Hu.

Six-Party Talks

17. (C) Hu said the 6PT was now at a "crucial moment." The challenge was to establish a verification mechanism agreeable to all parties. Each side must do its best and come up with a solution that satisfies all the parties. This was why Beijing and Seoul must maintain close cooperation. Hu hoped that the 6PT could soon "proceed to a new stage," proposing to Lee that the two Presidents instruct their representatives, Wu Dawei and Kim Sook, to cooperate closely on the talks.

North Korea Contingency

18. (C) Lee proposed that the ROK and PRC hold discussions regarding "possible situations on the Korean peninsula or Northeast Asia." Cho said the suggestion was Lee's way of indirectly proposing discussions on contingencies for the collapse of North Korea. Hu made no comment. Cho said the request was reasonable in light of the ROK-PRC agreement in May to create a "Strategic" Cooperative Partnership and that the ROKG was disappointed in China's lack of interest.

Military and Other Exchanges

19. (C) One unscripted exchange during the Lee-Hu meeting was Hu's proposal to exchange observers for "military exercises." Lee was caught off-guard and not prepared to respond. Cho said the ROK Ministry of Defense would follow up the proposal and assured us the ROKG was aware of U.S. sensitivities regarding PRC observation of joint U.S.-ROK exercises. Cho believed that the Chinese leader was merely probing.

110. (C) The two leaders repeated a pledge made in their May

2008 Joint Statement to develop the ROK-PRC relationship with more frequent "high-level" dialogue. Cho said neither side had yet acted on this pledge and that it was still a matter of discussion whether "high-level" meant the Foreign Minister or Vice Foreign Minister level.

¶11. (C) Cho added that in April 2007 PRC Prime Minister Wen Jiabao, during a visit to Seoul, proposed the establishment of hotlines between the ROK and PRC navies and air forces. Despite ROK requests for follow up, China has yet to act on the proposal.

ROK Participation with Japan in Trilateral

¶12. (C) Cho said the ROKG was still deliberating whether or not to participate in the ROK-PRC-Japan trilateral meeting scheduled for September in Japan. Cho said the ROK's dispute with Japan over the Dokdo islands (Liancourt Rocks) was such a sensitive issue for the ROK that Korea could not decide whether to meet with Japan in a trilateral setting, especially as the venue was Japan. Cho implored us to understand how sensitive an issue Dokdo was as a symbol of Japanese imperialism and aggression. Dokdo, he explained, was not incidental, but basic, to ROK-Japan relations.

Comment

¶13. (C) The Korean President quite clearly wanted a substantive discussion on North Korea, which was why this was the only topic in the "one-on-one" setting. Lee wanted to know whether China could help kick-start the inter-Korean dialogue; he was also keen to get an idea of Beijing's vision for a post-Kim Jong-il North Korea. On substance, Lee struck out.

¶14. (C) However, there were plenty of pleasantries. The seven-page summit document is full of bullet points, covering political, economic, and cultural cooperation projects. The summit was also a good opportunity to congratulate each other on the excellent Olympic performances. Korea won a record 13 gold medals, which played an instrumental role in hiking Lee's approval rating to over 25 percent. Lee Myung-bak has been in office six months and he has already met Hu three times, the same number as his encounters with President Bush. With us, the Koreans are much too eager to downplay the growing ROK-PRC relationship, rather like a man caught in an act of impropriety.

VERSHBOW